

Anti-Castro Cubans Say C.I.A. Imprisoned Them for 11 Weeks

Spokesman Asserts 17 Were Mistreated for Opposing Role for 'Batista Men'

By SAM POPE BREWER

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MIAMI, May 7.—An anti-Castro Cuban volunteer declared today that the Central Intelligence Agency had held him and sixteen others prisoner and incommunicado for eleven weeks before and during last month's abortive invasion of Cuba.

He said he was in fear of death much of the time.

The statements were made by Mr. Rodolfo Nodal Tarafa, 27-year-old lawyer, one of seventeen held in a remote camp in the jungle of Petén in northern Guatemala until last Friday. The fact of their imprisonment was well-known in Miami and was reported earlier.

Originally their number was given incorrectly as eighteen. The full details have not been available until now.

Dr. Nodal and his fellow prisoners have just organized a new Cuban movement to be known



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Guatemala's Petén region (cross) was said to be the site of a detention camp.

as the 17th of April movement in memory of the invasion they missed. They have called for the cooperation of all Cuban groups to overthrow Premier Fidel Castro but under Cuban leadership and without the participation of the C. I. A.

Dr. Nodal and his companions maintain that because they opposed Capt. Manuel Artile and other leaders backed by the C. I. A., they were threatened, handcuffed, kept in "subhuman" prison conditions, accused of being Communists and submitted to lie detector tests at gun point.

According to Dr. Nodal, members of the group were neither charged with any offense, nor brought to trial during their eleven weeks of imprisonment. He said that until they landed outside Miami last Friday they had not been able to find out where they were being taken.

They charge that the intelligence agency employed "thugs" and "gangsters" who stood between the Cuban volunteers and their own Cuban leaders. Dr. Nodal said that throughout their imprisonment, except for a few days, they were under "American" guards.

Pressed for details, he said that by "American" he meant that they were the C. I. A. representatives in charge of the camp who were assumed to be American and whose authority was unchallenged. He said that some spoke English with an accent and were believed by the Cubans to be naturalized United States citizens, "perhaps of Central European origin." They were known to the Cubans only by code names.

Most Refuse to Talk

Most of the former prisoners will not discuss their experiences for fear of some form of reprisal.

Dr. Nodal emphasized that the group's resentment was directed not against the United States but against the "incredible men" who ran the camp. This in chronological detail is his story:

Dr. Nodal came to Miami from Cuba to work for the Democratic Revolutionary Front last October. On Dec. 6 he enlisted in Miami and was sent to Guatemala for training.

On Jan. 31 about 300 men in the training camp at Trax, Guatemala, were mustered by their senior military adviser known to them only as Frank. They were told that two Cuban officers who had been in charge had been sent away "for playing politics."

This left Capt. José Perez San Román in charge of the camp as far as Cubans had any control. Captain San Román was one of the leaders of the April 17 invasion and has since been captured by the Cuban Government.

Exile sources here agree that Captain San Román was an officer in Cuba under Fulgencio Batista, whose dictatorial regime was overthrown by Fidel Castro. He is said to have fought against the Castro revolution in the Sierra Maestra, although there is no way to confirm this.

230 Seek to Resign

Of the 300 men, 230 asked to resign from the force at Camp Trax because of the change in leaders. A new North American agent known to them as Bernie then appeared on the scene. He accused the troops of insubordination as a result of Communist influence.

Bernie said he had authority from the Democratic Revolutionary Front to name commanders and that he had chosen Captain San Román.

The 230 dissenters demanded that their case be heard by a member of the Front within seventy-two hours. Otherwise they wished to be discharged and returned home.

They elected a committee of five to call on Bernie with their demand. He refused to see more than a single spokesman and Dr. Nodal was chosen by the others.

Dr. Nodal said he explained in detail that they were neither mercenaries nor conscripts but volunteers and that they could not accept leaders who they considered represented the op-

After discussion it was agreed that the men would continue training for five days while they waited to hear when they might expect a representative of the Democratic Front.

Troops Strike Again

When seven days had gone by without an answer the troops went on strike again.

Frank arrived back from a trip to Washington on that day but would say only that he hoped a representative of the Democratic Revolutionary Front would arrive "within a month."

The next day they were formally ordered back to training. Under the pressure of threats and promises all but twenty gave in during the next few days. The others agreed to resume training with the promise that their demands would be met.

On Feb. 11 the men were ordered out on a field exercise. While the camp was virtually empty one of the advisers called for eight of the twenty remaining standouts and asked them to go with him. They thought there was to be a further conference.

They were led along a jungle path to a big canvas-covered truck and suddenly found themselves covered by Thompson submachine guns held by three men. They were ordered into the truck and driven away.

At La Suiza, an estate where there was a Guatemalan Army camp, they were surrounded by eight or ten men with automatic weapons. The prisoners were taken from the truck one at a time and led away out of sight. They felt they were about to be shot.

Each was taken into a small room, forced to empty all his pockets and remove all his clothes.

"I felt this was it," Dr. Nodal said. "I was sure we were going to be murdered."

When they had given up all their possessions -- "even our love letters" -- they were told to dress again and taken away to a shed in the camp. As they assembled they found five other